Advice to combat *riya'*

- A person suffering from this grave disease is usually not aware that it has penetrated his personality and thus made his deeds worthless. The lures of the devil and the self are so subtle and the path of humanity is so delicate that unless he is very self-vigilant, he cannot understand this inherent evil. He imagines that his actions are for pleasing God, but in reality they are serving his own interests.
- Be your own physician and regularly scrutinize yourself for the real aims behind your good actions, words, and acts of worships. Do you feel the same fervour in doing good acts, offering prayers or fasts when you are alone or when these deeds are not known to anyone? Are you really performing good only for the sake of earning the pleasure of God? Do you feel a desire for your friends to praise you for your good deeds, intellectual endeavours, long prayers and piety? How do you feel when you are not praised for a certain good action? Compare your feelings when performing an action in public and then doing the same act when the chance of it being seen by others is least. If, God forbid, your eagerness to do an act of goodness or worship is more when you are in the company of your friends or in public or when there is a greater chance of it getting seen or praised, then consider yourself to be a victim of *riya'*.
- If you are acquiring knowledge, falling prey to *riya'* will make you desire to gain an important position in the eyes of scholars or men of honour by solving an important problem or presenting a topic in a unique way and to make you the focus of their attention in order to receive applause from them and the praise of the public at a gathering. Ask yourself: If a friend of mine or some one else had done the same feat in front of others or done it in a better way, would I have felt the same way? Was this action of mine only for God?
- Take a firm step to get rid of *riya'* for it is leading you to hell. Eradicate the desire of getting praised by creatures for the actions that are done for the sake of God. Do all your acts as a duty to God. Fight your inclination of performing virtuousness and worship in public or where there is a chance of getting praised, until this inclination is totally eliminated from your heart. Pray frequently to God Almighty to purify your heart of the stains of polytheism and hypocrisy and to clean it of the rust of the love of the world, which is the source of all vices.

Conclusion:

- The Prophet (s) said: "**One who performs an act that is liked by God in order to show off to people, and in secret manifests qualities that are not liked by God, he shall encounter the anger and wrath of God.**" [Al-Hurr al-'Amili, *al-Wasa'il,* v.1, p.69]

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... when they stand up to prayer they stand up sluggishly; they do it only to be seen of men and do not remember Allah except a little.

(Qur'an, 4: 142)

Imam al-Sadiq (a) said: "*Riya*' in any of its forms amounts to *shirk,* (polytheism); verily, one who works for the people, his reward lies with them, and one who works for God, his reward lies with God."
[Al-Kulayni, *al-Kafi*, vol. 2, p. 402]

Diseases of the Soul ...

Pretending Virtuousness

(*riya'*)

Imam al-Sadiq (a) said that Amir al-mu'minin Ali ibn Abi Talib (a) said: "There are three distinguishing features of one accustomed to *riya'*: he expresses joy and cheerfulness when he is greeted by people; he becomes cheerless and sullen when alone; and he wishes to be praised for everything he does."
[Al-Kulayni, *al-Kafi,* vol. 2, p. 295]

What is *riya'*?

Riya' means to falsely make oneself appear to be virtuous, good natured or a true believer before people for the sake of earning their respect and admiration, or for the purpose of gaining a good reputation among them. It differs from hypocrisy (*nifaq*) in that a hypocrite feigns integrity, uprightness, virtue, honesty and piety without sincere intention of acquiring these traits for the sake of God, while a person with *riya* acquires these good traits for the sake of pleasing God - however, he later performs good actions for the sake of gaining respect and good reputation among people.

The stages of *riya'*

- The first stage: A person makes a display of his religious beliefs, and shows off his knowledge of religious teachings in order to project himself as an honest person in the eyes of people in order to gain their confidence and respect. For example, he tries to make a display of his trust in God and His Power, saying that he does not believe in any being except Him. When trust in God or submission to His Will is discussed, he wags his head in affirmation with a sigh, and thus deceives people giving an impression that he is a true believer. This stage of *riya*' is also seen in a person who eradicates false beliefs from his heart and, through such purification, wants to attain power and respect among people by making an overt or covert display of his purity. For instance, when *nifaq* (hypocrisy) is mentioned, his utterances or gestures will be of a person who is purified of it.
- The second stage: The individual demonstrates his piety and virtuous deeds and he then behaves in such a manner as if he is free from all vices. The aim behind such actions is to win the confidence of others. For example, a person may give charity or claim great spirituality in order to win respect and praise.
- The third stage: It is marked by an individual's overt performance of the prescribed forms of acts of worships and good deeds in front of other people on purely rational grounds and with the intention of posing himself as a person who strictly adheres to the religious commands or abstains from evil deeds. He thus wishes to win the hearts of people and attract their attention towards himself in the name of religion. For example, a person may observe obligatory prayers strictly on time or pray night prayers in order to be known as virtuous and God fearing by his circle of friends or common people.

The devastating effects of *riya'*.....

- A person suffering from *riya'* fails to realise that even if he earns worldly fame among people, scholars or the elite, he will be disgraced in the eyes of the King of kings, and his actions will lead him to *Sijjin* (the lowest level of hell).
- *Riya'* is often accompanied with other serious moral vices. One of these vices is *sum`ah,* which means to orally transmit one's good qualities to the ears of people for the purpose of attracting them and publicising oneself. A person with *riya'* usually likes to humiliate others, and injures the feelings of brothers and sisters-in-faith. He is often rude to a pious person and behaves proudly with him in order to project himself to be more virtuous.
- If the tree of *riya'* grows for a long time in a person's heart, it leads him to become a hypocrite. Each one of the vices mentioned above is enough to land a person in hell.
- It is stated in the traditions that the person used to *riya'* i.e. the person who displays his devotion, high religious status, knowledge, preaching, leading of prayers, fasts and other pious deeds for the sake of gaining respect in the hearts of people instead of truly seeking reward from God is a polytheist (*mushrik*). His idolatry (*shirk*) is confirmed by the Qur'an and the traditions narrated through the Holy Household of the Prophet (s) and therefore his sin is unpardonable.
- Imam al-Sadiq (a) was asked about the words of the Almighty that `*whosoever is desirous of meeting his Creator, he should perform virtuous deeds and should not ascribe any partner to God in his worship*,' (18:110) seeking an explanation. Imam al-Sadiq (a) replied, `**The acts of a person who performs good deeds not for the sake of being blessed with the vision of his God, but rather aiming to be considered as pious by the people, and so that people should know about his deeds [will cause that person to be] counted among polytheists who have ascribed partners to God.**' The Imam (a) continued: `**There is no one in the world who has concealed his good deeds and after a passage of time God has *not* revealed them. And there is no one in the world who could conceal his wicked deeds for ever, for they will be exposed by God before he passes away from the world.** [Al-Kulayni, *al-Kafi,* vol. 2, p. 453]

The stations of the faithful and the *awliyaa'* vary

Those who acquire virtues and give up sins are grouped with the saints and friends of God *(awliya' Allah)*. As for other individuals, the nature of their sins and virtues is determined by the spiritual station to which they belong. Qualities that are regarded as virtues for people of a lower station may be perceived as sins by those of a higher station. Sincerity *(ikhlas)* is the highest stage of freedom from *riya'* and is a distinct quality of the friends of God. Common people generally have a natural tendency to make their virtues known to others. While doing so does not harm their faith (*iman)* or sincerity *(ikhlas),* the same trait is considered a shortcoming in the case of a friend of God. And due to his close proximity to Divine Essence, it may amount to *nifaq* or *shirk.*

- Imam al-Baqir (a) was asked about the status of a person who became happy when others observed good deeds that he had performed. Imam (a) replied: **"There is no harm in it; there is no one who does not like his good deeds to be known to people, but he should not perform them [solely] for the sake of attracting their admiration**." [Al-Kulayni, *al-Kafi,* vol. 2, p. 297]